



The Walking Purchase

“YOU RUN, that’s not fair, you was to Walk.” Thus, twenty years afterward, someone remembered an Indian’s objection to the “Walking Purchase” of 1737, probably the most widely known and perhaps the least understood of Pennsylvania’s Indian purchases.

William Penn, who died almost twenty years before the “Walking Purchase,” is famous for his just treatment of the Indians. Though not legally required to pay the Indians for his Pennsylvania lands, he nevertheless had done so, both from a sense of justice and for the sake of peaceful relations between his settlers and the Indians; and he and his agents had made at least seventeen purchases from the Indians living near the lower Delaware River.

Most of these purchases involved narrow tracts of land, often overlapping; but on paper, at least, some of them ran far back into the country: two days’ travel by horse, as far as a man could go in a day and a half or two days, or in one case “to the utmost bounds of the said Province.” Such measurements, however important to Penn, meant

little to the Indians so long as they were not hurried off the land. In at least one instance Penn had the land measured; the man’s two-day travel, specified in a 1685 deed, was surveyed three years later as a line from Philadelphia to the Susquehanna, a distance of about seventy miles.

Soon after William Penn’s death in 1718, his secretary James Logan had these purchases confirmed by a single deed from Sasoonan and other Indians representing those who had made the earlier sales. Extending north to the Lehigh Hills and from the Delaware River to the lower Susquehanna, this deed did not actually include all the land that might have been claimed under the earlier ones—it certainly did not extend “to the utmost bounds” of Pennsylvania—but it included as much as was then needed for the white settlers.

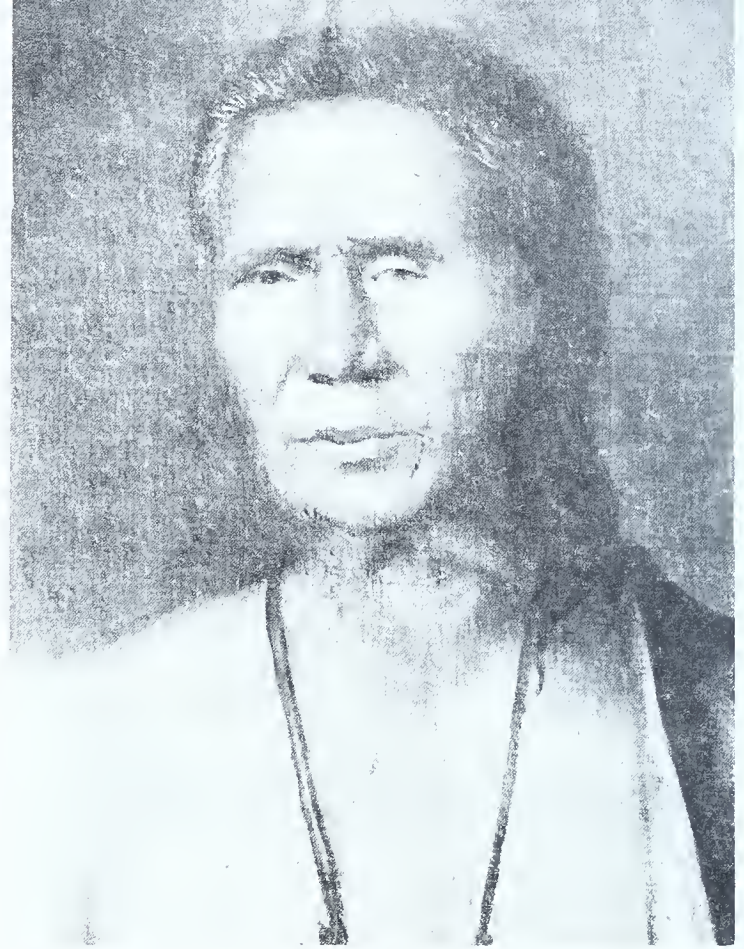
For fourteen years thereafter no further purchases were made, though new settlers continued to arrive. Without the Penns’ permission, moreover, people from New York settled up the Schuylkill River and on the “Minisink Lands” along the

upper Delaware, where they occupied choice lands outside the area of the 1718 purchase. Not until 1727, when William Penn's three sons became the Proprietors of Pennsylvania, was Logan able to deal with these problems. He then sent agents to settle affairs in the Minisink country. This undertaking was not very successful, however; so, since the trespassers needed to be brought under Pennsylvania control and because more land was needed for settlers, Logan urged the new Proprietors to come to America to meet the Indians and make new purchases.

Thomas Penn, second of the three sons, arrived in August, 1732, and his older brother John about two years later. Within a few weeks of Thomas Penn's arrival, Sasoonan and his people agreed to sell the Schuylkill lands. The lands up the Delaware, to which Logan then turned, proved a more troublesome matter, about which discussions went on for five years.

Nutimus and his band, the Delaware Indians who lived about the "Forks of Delaware" (Northampton County), were originally from New Jersey and had made no previous land sales to the Penns. Nutimus was related to the Indians previously resident at the "Forks," however, and had lived there himself for several years. Nutimus met Thomas Penn in June, 1733; they exchanged presents, as was customary at Indian treaties, and Nutimus expressed the hope that the peace established by William Penn might continue. However, neither then nor a year later when they met again at Durham did Nutimus show any inclination to sell his land claims.

The Proprietors and Logan then began to press the matter, and at Pennsbury, in May, 1735, they laid before Nutimus evidence that the "Forks" country had been sold before he and his band had settled there. In 1686, they told him, the Indians had sold William Penn a tract of land that, beginning at the present Wrightstown, Bucks County, was to extend back as far as a man could go in a day and a half. The measurement, not very exact at best, apparently had not been made; but since the two-day depth of the 1685 purchase had been measured as about seventy miles, it might be assumed that the 1686 tract would extend at least



Courtesy Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Lappawinzoe (or Lapawinso), one of the Delawares who signed the Walking Purchase treaty, from the portrait by Gustavus Hesselius.

fifty miles, or about to the Blue Mountain. Only part of this, obviously, had been covered by the general deed of 1718.

Nutimus objected, no doubt truthfully, that he knew nothing of the 1686 deed which he was now asked to approve; but since he had been living in New Jersey at that time, this did not seem to the Penns any real obstacle. They therefore had some of the "Forks" land surveyed for sale, opened part of it to settlers, and reserved for themselves a 6,500-acre "Indian Tract Manor" on which the Indians might continue to live. They arranged moreover for the day-and-a-half walk to be measured out and hired men to mark and clear the way for the walkers.

Even then Nutimus did not immediately release his claims. On the contrary, Logan heard that he was planning to ask the more powerful Six Nations Indians for help, and took prompt steps to prevent such an alliance. When Six Nations leaders came to Philadelphia in 1736 to

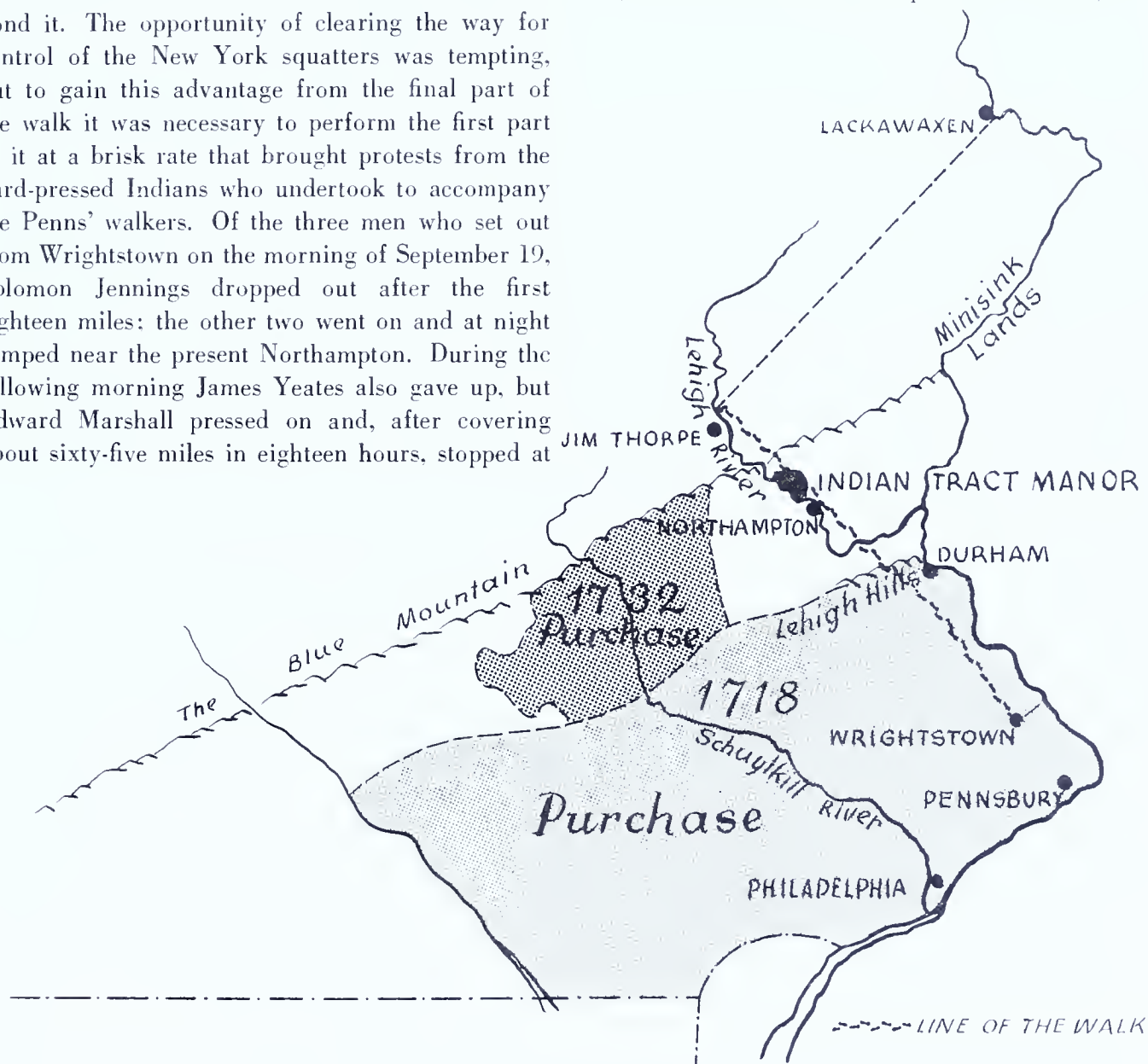
sell their claims to lands on the lower Susquehanna, Logan also drew up a second deed signed on October 25, by which these Indians gave up any further interest in southeastern Pennsylvania, including the "Forks" country. Then, finally, the "Forks" Indians came to terms; and on August 25, 1737, four of their leaders, Manawkyhickon, Lappawinzoe, Teeshacomin, and Nootamis (or Nutimus) signed a deed confirming the sale of 1686.

Now ready to measure this purchase, Logan hired men to make the walk. By this time it had occurred to someone that if this measurement could be stretched far enough the 1686 grant could be made to take in not only the "Forks" country below the Blue Mountain but also the Minisink lands beyond it. The opportunity of clearing the way for control of the New York squatters was tempting, but to gain this advantage from the final part of the walk it was necessary to perform the first part of it at a brisk rate that brought protests from the hard-pressed Indians who undertook to accompany the Penns' walkers. Of the three men who set out from Wrightstown on the morning of September 19, Solomon Jennings dropped out after the first eighteen miles; the other two went on and at night camped near the present Northampton. During the following morning James Yeates also gave up, but Edward Marshall pressed on and, after covering about sixty-five miles in eighteen hours, stopped at

a point somewhere east or north of the present Jim Thorpe.

The limits of the purchase were then marked by a line, run at right angles to the direction of the walk, which struck the Delaware River near the present Lackawaxen; and because of the curves of the river this added to the purchase a great extent of country north of the Blue Mountain. Aside from the Minisink lands, however, the land beyond the mountain was then of little interest; in actual practice, for purposes of land grants and settlement, the "Walking Purchase" ended at the Blue Mountain.

Despite their complaints about the "Walk" itself, the Indians remained quiet for a time, and





Courtesy Historical Society of Pennsylvania

James Logan (1674-1751), who came to Pennsylvania as William Penn's secretary in 1699 and remained as agent of the Proprietors. This portrait is based on an original by Gustavus Hesselius.

on November 3, 1738, Nutimus visited Philadelphia and exchanged gifts with the Governor. About two years later, however, he and other Indians signed complaining letters to Pennsylvania officials and threatened to seek the help of neighboring tribes to defend their lands. These letters certainly were written by white men, who may have encouraged the protests. Logan, taking no chances, called on the Six Nations to stand by the agreement they had made in 1736. In fact these Indians went far beyond that—too far, indeed—and at Philadelphia in 1742 one of their leaders, in a loud and threatening speech, told Nutimus that the Delawares had no land left and ordered them off what they had sold.

But the thing that more than any other gave the "Walking Purchase" its bad reputation took place twenty years after the event. When, during the French and Indian War, Indian war parties attacked Pennsylvania settlers, groups opposed to

the Proprietary government charged that this hostility was a result of the "Walking Purchase." This explanation was especially attractive to Quaker politicians, who, criticized for not providing military protection for the settlers, preferred to believe that the real fault lay with William Penn's sons for abandoning their father's Quaker principles. It must be noted, however, that this explanation overlooks the part played by the French in turning the Indians against the English, the fact that the Indians attacked other colonies as well as Pennsylvania, and the fact that the "Walking Purchase" had been negotiated by William Penn's secretary, himself a Quaker.

To embarrass the Proprietors, their political enemies enlisted the help of one of Nutimus' followers, Teedyuscung, an able and imposing man, though unstable and with more than the usual Indian fondness for rum. Teedyuscung accused the Proprietors of fraud, and his charges then were reported to the King, who ordered an investigation. Like the original "Walking Purchase" negotiations, this investigation dragged on for some time. In 1762, finally, when the matter came to a hearing, Teedyuscung withdrew his charges; so the case never was decided on its merits. Teedyuscung meanwhile had illustrated his own confused notions of land ownership by offering to sell the Penns' "Indian Tract Manor" to a white settler.

It was in consequence of this political quarrel that most of the known accounts of the "Walking Purchase" were written, to support one or the other of two contradictory views; and these biased stories are in turn responsible both for a widespread popular interest in the incident and for a great deal of confusion concerning it. In spite of its faults, some of which were almost unavoidable in dealings between white men and Indians, the "Walking Purchase" compares favorably with the treatment of Indians in most of the colonies; and the later concern about its fairness was in part at least a tribute to the high standard of justice and the lasting influence of William Penn.